

Spaceworld 97

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Un article sur le Spaceworld 1997

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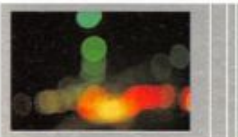
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NINTENDO STUNS AT SPACE WORLD '97

Nintendo's Space World '97, held in Tokyo in late November, was cautiously hailed as a success by Western delegates. The unveiling of playable versions of *The Legend of Zelda*, *F-Zero X*, and *Yoshi's Story* confirmed all high hopes for these flagship titles, and *1080° Snowboarding* proved that there's innovation beyond Nintendo's established game franchises. On the other hand, it was announced that the Japanese launch of Nintendo 64DD has been postponed from March until July (with no news of a US or European release date), there was little evidence to suggest that thirdparty Nintendo 64 development is getting any better, and there's no guarantee that *Pocket Monsters* – by far and away Nintendo's biggest success of 1997 – will repeat its bizarre success outside of Japan.

But perhaps the main talking point of the show was the unveiling of Nintendo's exceptional *Legend of Zelda* (see page 38) currently still planned for a huge 256Mbit cart and not for 64DD as had been previously forecasted. This not only marks a new upper limit on cart size (which is both good news for gamers and developers) but perhaps also a temporary sidelining of the entire Nintendo 64DD project – at least in terms of its direct application to conventional videogames. As a game to push the system further than anything before it – many

have already suggested that it's better than *Super Mario 64* – it should set new standards upon its planned Japanese release in April next year.

But it wasn't just *Zelda* that ignited the hopes of gamers at Space World '97. Three other titles also proved that the Nintendo 64 will continue to remain the platform of choice for gameplay connoisseurs. *1080° Snowboarding* (previously entitled *Vertical Edge Snowboarding*) possibly emerged as the biggest surprise from a newly formed group within Nintendo's Kyoto-based HQ. This offers boarding thrills with a subtle blend of hi-tech simulation and arcade action and firmly puts all other efforts in the shade (see p52). *F-Zero X* (p40) is the long-awaited sequel to the 16bit SNES classic, and is the first 3D game on Nintendo's machine to run at a blisteringly smooth 60fps. So fast, in fact, that **Edge** must confess to feeling slightly queasy after a session hurtling along its busy tracks (although a Space World hot dog could equally have been to blame).

Yet another update to a classic SNES game was *Yoshi's Story*, which takes 2D gaming to new heights, the Nintendo 64's analogue controller giving a new twist to the platform-based, run 'n' jump gameplay. Visually this title redefines 2D platform gaming with a sumptuous mixture of prerendered



Most of those lamenting NCL's decision to delay its official 64DD launch until July were partially appeased by the introduction of curious future hardware add-ons such as the novel GB Pak (above). The *Mario Artist* series (left) and *F-Zero X* (top left) were show highlights

and polygon-based 2D that owes much to the graphically rich prerendered scenery of *Donkey Kong Country* but with the intricate, deep gameplay mechanics of *Yoshi's Island* underpinning it all.

Aside from these flagship titles, the impact of other software debuting at Space World was more than overshadowed by the announcement of several new hardware additions encompassing not only its 64bit games system but its seven-year-old Game Boy technology, too. Naturally its 64DD player commanded the most attention – despite the fact that games such as *Zelda* had curiously given way to creative software along the lines of the SNES title *Mario Paint*. Fortunately, its trio of titles in the *Mario Artist* series – *Talent Maker*, *Polygon Maker* and *Picture Maker* – did show signs of ingenuity, transforming the N64 into a creative platform with the emphasis on fun and accessibility rather than practical application. The fact that data is transferable between all three titles should make this an attractive series in Japan – particularly given the Japanese childhood obsession with designing their own interpretations of popular game and cartoon characters.

But it is the *Pocket Monsters* series – a Japanese phenomenon in itself – that has seemingly monopolised NCL's development resources for the 64DD. *Pocket Monsters* are

essentially *Tamagotchi*'s big brother, and in Japan, *Pocket Monsters* on the Game Boy was not only the biggest-selling game of 1997 (yes, even bigger than *Final Fantasy VII*) but also the biggest-selling Game Boy cart of all time (surpassing sales of *Super Mario Land*). *Pocket Monsters* for the 64DD signals the introduction of perhaps the oddest but most interesting add-on for the 64DD, too – the GB adaptor allowing the connection of up to four Game Boy *Pocket Monster* cartridges to the 64DD via N64 joypads, bringing with it the prospect of realtime 3D battles using original Game Boy *Pocket Monsters* data. With over eight million owners of the 8bit *Pocket Monsters* cartridge in place (*Tamagotchis* have been miserably relegated to the status of a past fad), 64bit disk-based versions of *Pocket Monsters* must surely be a dream killer app for the 64DD – not to mention a lucrative money spinner.

Another odd piece of hardware launched by Nintendo at the show was its voice-recognition headset and microphone for its forthcoming virtual pet game *Pikachu Genki De Chu*. A stage demonstration revealed an extraordinary game that proved popular with younger members of audience who were invited to speak to the on-screen *Pocket Monster* and rewarded with some great emotive animation. Insulting *Pikachu*, for example, upsets him, sending him scuttling off into the background to play with the butterflies.



Space World '97 was held in Makuhari, outside central Tokyo, in one of the world's largest convention centres



Given *Zelda*'s awesome presence it's debatable just how many delegates noticed the red carpet treatment





F-Zero X (above) and 1080° Snowboarding (above right), occupied banks of monitors providing ample space for everyone to get a go. Saturday was open to the public, however, and a different story...



Nintendo's Pocket Camera - another Game Boy innovation - proved amusing for those not averse to looking monochrome

But while Nintendo's overall software and hardware lineup was replete with fresh ideas and original content, the thirdparty software lineup continues to look horribly undernourished. With legions of second-rate clones making up the thirdparty assault, there seems to be little improvement on last year's efforts. **Edge** bumped into Argonaut's Jez San at the show who offered some opinions as to why this is the case. "Very few thirdparty developers are actually working with N64," he points out, "and this is partly because development systems are hard to come buy, and partly because publishers willing to take the risk are hard to come by. So if you can't get a deal to do a game for Nintendo itself there's little point developing an N64 game because it will be very tough finding anyone else to publish it. Also, N64 isn't exactly an easy machine to develop for because it's cartridge based which means that you have to spend a lot of time working out how to make the game fit into the cartridge, on top of the time it takes you to figure out how to make a good game."

Is there light at the end of the tunnel? Nintendo of America's VP of marketing **George Harrison** reckons so, and argues that the obstacles to thirdparty success are diminishing. "I think we were probably not as good as we could have been at providing them with technical support early on," he explains. "At the time of N64's launch we had our "dream team" strategy and we really narrowed down the group of people who were given an early look at the machine

and given the early support that they needed. And even some of these people struggled. Even now, as we expand our support to a larger universe of licensees, we've not had all the technical support in place to do that. Besides," he concludes, "some licensees have more expertise and resources than others, and it's a challenge for many people to match the time and dollar investment that Nintendo puts into its own titles."

Certainly, recent cuts in N64 cart costs have prompted more thirdparties (with heftier budgets and more expertise) to sign up, but it's too early to see the results of this just yet.

Nintendo chairman Hiroshi Yamauchi's annual address to the Japanese videogame industry is always a highlight of Space World - if only to be amazed how it can take a whole hour to make about five minutes' worth of points. But if delegates could keep their eyelids from drooping, there were not only messages for the industry as a whole but ones that naturally help to increase Nintendo's market share, too. "Overseas, Nintendo 64 has been highly regarded. But in Japan, the feedback hasn't been as good as anticipated," he began. Delegates shuffled their feet and averted their gaze, as if each anticipated a personal verbal battering to come. "Perhaps some people think it's because there aren't enough games released," Mr. Yamauchi pondered, "or maybe people say it's because there are no roleplaying games." He paused, then he dropped his bombshell. "In fact, the [Japanese]



For those who could stay awake throughout, Hiroshi Yamauchi's annual address reiterated the N64's familiar 'quality over quantity' motif and described the Pocket Monsters phenomenon



This November's revamped Space World exhibition was arguably the finest in recent years, featuring a combination of top-quality home-grown titles and quirky new hardware add-ons such as the Pocket Camera (centre top). Only the best-behaved kiddies (right) got to attend on the trade-only day

videogame market is no longer driven mainly by TV-based console games," was his diagnosis. "The recent videogame console market is losing momentum," he warned, "and naturally it's because of too many boring or too complicated software, that ordinary users can't enjoy playing." He went on to conclude that, "Such games are flooding the market."

And his prescription for how the videogame industry should get out of this fix? Two things: one, learn from the record-breaking success of the Game Boy's *Pocket Monster* series; and two, when it comes to releasing console games, it's quality not quantity that counts. Western gamers will be forgiven for feeling a distinct sense of déjà vu at the latter remark and also for raising an incredulous eyebrow at Mr. Yamauchi's grim view of the videogame market. Particularly when it could be argued that the *Pocket Monsters* phenomenon is little more than a spectacular but typically Japanese short-term fad which has given a much-needed boost for Nintendo in an otherwise tough year. But Space World is a show aimed for the Japanese market (despite the west's tendency to view it as a barometer for Nintendo's fortunes around the world) and Mr. Yamauchi was addressing specific Japanese needs and problems. As for the 'quality not quantity' mantra, there's both value in what he says and a need to take this stance, given the continued lack of third-party support for Nintendo 64.

Can *Pocket Monsters* succeed the outside of Japan? "We hope so," admits George Harrison. "We're going to make an effort to bring it to the US on Game Boy in late 1998. It involves

not only a large effort to translate the game itself, which is of course a roleplaying game, but also an effort to simultaneously bring together all of the elements that have made it successful in Japan, including a TV show and all sorts of merchandising elements that turned it from being just another game into a complete phenomena."

In all, Space World '97 was an interesting show - perhaps the best in recent years. And while Mr. Yamauchi may be looking to *Pocket Monsters* to keep him smiling in 1998, western gamers have at least four cracking new Nintendo 64 games to look forward to, and maybe even the 64DD. But for that, all eyes will be on June's E3.



The excellent *Yoshi's Story* was a big hit with young and old alike, but for those not quite sure what was going on, help was at hand...

Space World '97 lineup	
Playable Nintendo-developed titles:	
Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time	
Yoshi's Story	
F-Zero X	
Diddy Kong Racing	
Sanjio & Kazuoki's Big Adventure	
100% Snowboarding	
NBA Basketball	
Non-playable Nintendo-developed titles:	
Punchy Gaidai Dai Chu	
Mario Artist Legend	
Talent Maker	
Polygon Maker	
Picture Maker	
Pocket Monster Snap	
Pocket Monitor 64	
Pocket Monitor Stadium	
Match 3	
Super Mario 16x2	
Jungle Emperor Leo	
Sim City 64	
Third-party playable titles:	
EO-TERRA (Atari)	
In the Zone (Atari)	
Nagayo (Konami)	
Gato (Konami)	
Aero Gauge (Acad)	
Kiteko Kuzensu (Imagineer)	
64 Ozone (Bottom Up)	
Sonic Wings! Assault (Video Systems/Victoria)	
Super Robot Spirits (Banpresto)	
Chameleon (West Atlantic/Kiwi Systems Supply)	
Augusta Medalist (TBE Soft)	
Lamborghini 64 (Tilt)	
Top Gear Rally (Midway/Konami)	
Granby's 3D Hockey (Midway/Atari Games)	
Hookin' (Interactive)	
SF Rush (Midway/Atari Games)	
Gratsky 98 (Midway/Atari Games)	
Coylefighter 63 7.0 (Interplay)	
Extreme-G (Acclaim)	
NFL OBG 97 (Acclaim)	
FIFA Road to Victory '98 (EA)	
Fantasia (Namco)	
Dual Heroes (Hudson)	
Denyu Inara Bou (Hudson)	
Pachinko 264 Days (Seta)	
Tamagotchi World (Bandai)	
Mom's Shop (Seta)	
Pro Yakyuu King 2 (Imagineer)	
Elite (Imagineer)	
Snow Spreader (Imagineer)	
Sim City 2000 (Imagineer)	
Fighting Cup (Imagineer)	
Wild Choppers (Seta)	
Low Limit (Seta)	
Space Circuit (Imagineer)	
Sim Coaster (EA/Meade)	